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ABSTRACT

From its conception in 1945 Roosevelt University in Chicago has been innovative in its dealings with students, faculty and curriculum. Now, at a time when the enormous expansion of the state supported junior and senior colleges and fluctuations in the federal support of higher education has periled the existence of many private colleges and universities, Roosevelt has shown that there is a need for private higher education that respects students as individuals, is responsive to their needs, is conveniently located, and which encourages part-time and older students. Almost alone among the private urban universities in this country, Roosevelt has increased its enrollment and balanced its budget. By the time the University celebrates its 30th anniversary in 1975, it is planned that enrollment will be approximately 8,000 students, that an external degree program will be firmly established, that much of the remainder of the Auditorium Building (purchased in 1947) will be renovated and air-conditioned, and that progress on an urban learning center will be well underway. (Author/HS)

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY

Roosevelt College was founded on April 17, 1945, by its first president, Edward J. Sparling, and a board of six men: Harland Allen, Edwin Embree (Chairman), Percy Julian, Leo Lerner, John McGrath, and Floyd Reeves. Initially, the institution was to have been called Thomas Jefferson College, but the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt moved its founders to adopt his name.

The college grew out of the Central YMCA College of Chicago. In a controversy over academic freedom and discrimination with the governing board of that institution, which was to be an important determinant in the character of the new institution, the president resigned his position. A group of some sixty-eight members of the faculty, including the dean of faculties, resigned from the Central YMCA College and joined him in the establishment of the new college.

Classes began in September, 1945, with over 1,300 students in somewhat makeshift office facilities on Wells Street in downtown Chicago. The enrollment of Roosevelt College, as of most other academic institutions, was soon swelled by an influx of returning veterans. In February, 1946, nine students were awarded bachelor's degrees in the College's first commencement. Because Roosevelt College was in fact a continuation of a predecessor institution, moving a faculty, administrative staff, student body and library virtually intact, it was able to apply for accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools almost immediately. This accreditation was granted in March, 1946.

Some of the flavor of this early period is evident in the enthusiasm, confidence, and pride expressed in this excerpt from a report by the Dean of Faculties to the Board of Trustees on December 17, 1945.

> If it is foolhardy for 68 men to resign their jobs without assurance of future security, the faculty of Roosevelt College was foolhardy.
>
> If it is impossible to remodel an 11-story building in 33 days, equipping it with classrooms, library, laboratories, and offices, Roosevelt College was an impossibility.
>
> If it is absurd for a new college to offer such subjects as advanced calculus, to apply for accreditation 6 days after the opening of school, and to graduate a class at the end of the first 17 weeks, then Roosevelt College is absurd.
>
> If it is radical to teach future labor leaders, as well as future business men, the mysteries of accounting; if it is radical to supply Jews, Poles, Japanese, and Negroes as well

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> as Anglo-Saxons with the tools of language, then Roosevelt College is radical.
>
> If it is impractical to give employed men and women during the evening hours courses of standard quality in history, chemistry, and music, Roosevelt College is impractical.
>
> I am proud to say that Roosevelt College is in these ways foolhardy, impossible, absurd, radical and impractical.[1]

Faculty participation in the governance of the new college was encouraged by its president and became an important part of its ethos. In addition to faculty membership on the governing board there were a number of other democratic innovations. Deans, although appointed by the Board, had to be confirmed by a two-thirds vote of the faculty. The deans and the president had to submit to a vote of confidence from the faculty every three years. Department chairmen were elected by the executive committee of each school (later college) which was itself composed of elected faculty representatives as well as the school dean, the dean of faculties, and the president. Every full-time member of the faculty and every part-time member with one or more years of service, including members of the administrative staff, had the right to vote. Furthermore, a grievance procedure was adopted, similar to procedures used in the labor movement, which gave any full-time employee of the College the right to file a grievance whenever he felt there was a serious difference of opinion with another member of the faculty or administrative staff. The grievance procedure involved arbitration and appeal at various levels up to the Board of Trustees. A parallel procedure was adopted for the student body as well.[2]

A later innovation, as egalitarian as any of these, was the creation of a Budget Committee, responsible to the Board of Trustees for the formulation of a balanced budget, on which half of the members were faculty elected by the Senate. The president served merely as one among a number of ex officio administrative members on this Committee, which became one of the most powerful bodies in the institution.

The College opened in temporary facilities in September, 1945. The following year it purchased the historic Auditorium Building and in September, 1947, moved to its permanent location at Congress and Michigan Avenues, in downtown Chicago. The surge of serious students attending under the G. I. Bill

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[1] Wayne A. R. Leys, "Report to the Board," Minutes of the Roosevelt College Board of Directors, December 17, 1945.

[2] These innovations were described by Sparling in: "Evaluating Some Efforts to Achieve Democracy in Administration," Democracy in the Administration of Higher Education, Tenth Yearbook of the John Dewey Society, ed. by Harold Benjamin (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), pp. 204-22.

gave the young college a feeling of confidence, stability, and mission which went a long way--although not as far as the controller would have liked--to compensate for the institution's utter lack of endowment. Funding was to remain a chronic problem. Many liberal Chicagoans, impressed with the college's ideals and its determination to integrate higher education, gave money to support the institution; but these sums tended to be relatively small. Its liberal image (radical, in the minds of many) and the history of the controversy with the Board of the Central YMCA College seemed to alienate many corporate and "establishment" sources. Roosevelt College learned, as have some other private institutions, to operate on tuition income. Fund-raising counted for no more than 10 to 15 per cent of the annual budget, the lion's share of which came from tuition. This percentage has remained relatively stable throughout the institution's history.

Within three years of its founding, Roosevelt College grew to an enrollment of over 6,000 students and found itself one of the largest private undergraduate colleges in the country. Many of these students held part or full-time jobs and attended classes at night. The College attracted working students by its flexible course-scheduling which made it possible to earn a degree in most departments on a part-time evening basis.

In 1951, the College ambitiously, albeit tentatively, initiated graduate work. By the spring of 1954, it was ready to declare itself a University. In that year, too, the institution effected a merger between its School of Music and the much older Chicago Musical College. Accreditation of the Master's level programs was awarded in March, 1955, by the North Central Association and confirmed the change from college to university. By 1971, fifty undergraduate departments and programs and twenty-two Master's Degree level programs had been established.

From the start, the institution's curriculum and administrative structure reflected an urban focus and orientation, and a commitment to community needs. In 1946 a Labor Education Division was established, on a par with the other principal academic divisions, to conduct special educational programs for labor union leaders and others. Subsequently, a Division (later College) of Continuing Education was established to meet the educational needs of adult students. Recently, Roosevelt University expressed its educational role as including three elements responsive to social needs: (1) creating avenues for upward mobility and the removal of barriers of race prejudice and of economic deprivation, (2) providing opportunities for students at all levels to resume an interrupted education, and (3) enabling individuals to prepare themselves for new careers.[1]

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[1]--"The Mission of Roosevelt University," Planning Committee of Roosevelt University, May, 1969.

In October, 1959, the Board of Trustees of Roosevelt University authorized the creation of the Auditorium Theatre Council and authorized it to raise funds for the restoration of the Theatre which occupies the center of the University's building. Under the chairmanship of trustee Beatrice Spachner over $3 million was raised; in 1967 the Theatre was reopened. One of the first events to be held in the Theatre was the inauguration of President Rolf A. Weil.

President Weil had served as acting president since 1965 and prior to that as chairman of the Economics and Finance Departments and dean of the College of Business Administration. Under President Weil's leadership and that of Board chairmen Lyle M. Spencer and Jerome H. Stone, an "Up to Excellence" capital funds campaign was launched. This successful campaign, which included munificent gifts from the Walter E. Heller Foundation and from the Crown family, as well as other corporate, labor, foundation, federal, and individual contributions, exceeded its announced goal of $7.5 million by $2.5 million and made possible the construction of much needed new facilities and the remodeling of a substantial portion of the classrooms and faculty offices in the Auditorium Building. The Herman Crown Center dormitory and student union was dedicated in September, 1971. It has the capacity to house 560 students in the first of two towers and can accommodate a variety of student activities and organizations. The Walter E. Heller Center, constructed in what was formerly a light and air court in the center of the Auditorium Building, contains new classrooms, science and language laboratories, faculty offices, and additional library space. The University Tower, unused for over 30 years, was remodeled into faculty offices. Similar remodeling and renovation was carried out in the Michigan Avenue wing of the building. The restoration of the main lobby in 1972 helped preserve the buildings outstanding architectural heritage as did the restoration of the Theatre completed in 1967.

Recognizing the importance of its teacher education programs, the faculty and Board of Trustees established a College of Education in September, 1972, as one of the major academic divisions of the University. Teacher education has been a significant component of the institution since its inception. Roosevelt has prepared more teachers for the Chicago public school system than any other private college or university. The importance of teacher education and of the basic research on which it must be based was underscored by a grant from the Spencer Foundation in 1972 by means of which the research capability of the new College of Education is being expanded.

Also in 1972 a new fund drive for $15 million was launched based on a long-range plan, "Commitment for the 70's," which was developed by the faculty and administration, and approved by the Board. Included in this "Over the Threshold to Greatness" campaign are funds for academic development, for balancing the operating budget, and for the planning and land

acquisition necessary to create an urban learning center.

At a time when the enormous expansion of the state supported junior and senior colleges and fluctuations in the federal support of higher education has periled the existence of many private colleges and universities, Roosevelt has shown that there is a need for private higher education which respects students as individuals, is responsive to their needs, is conveniently located, and which encourages part-time and older students. Almost alone among the private urban universities in this country, Roosevelt has increased its enrollment and balanced its budget. By the time the University celebrates its 30th anniversary in 1965, it is planned that enrollment will be approximately 8,000 students, that an external degree program will be firmly established, that much of the remainder of the Auditorium Building will be renovated and air-conditioned, and that progress on the urban learning center will be well underway.

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12/14/72